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HOW TO RAISE ARMIES

A LESSON FOR AMERICA FROM BRITISH EXPERIENCE

BY SYDNEY BROOKS

THE imminent possibility of a war with Germany imposes upon the United States the necessity of testing very thoroughly her military organization and of assimilating and applying the lessons of the European struggle. In this article I propose to show, by particular reference to Great Britain, the scope and character of just one of those lessons—the lesson of how to raise, and incidentally also of how not to raise, the largest armies that a commercial and non-military nation can produce.

The United States has much to learn from all the belligerents, but most of all from Great Britain; and if and when Americans are forced, as we in England were forced in 1914, to fight a sudden and supreme fight for national existence, to gather up all their resources of men and material, transform them to military uses, and hurl them in a single thunderbolt against a long-prepared enemy, it is to British experience in the present war that they will turn both for the guidance and for the warnings to be extracted from it. That is not because Great Britain has managed her part in the war with a faultless and mechanical perfection. Her people have, indeed, accomplished marvels. In less than two and a half years they have built up a military organization which in efficiency and equipment equals, if it does not surpass, the machine that it took the Germans forty years of unswerving effort to construct. But though the achievements that stand to the credit of the British side of the account are prodigious and indisputable, they might have been attained more expeditiously and with a much smaller expenditure of money and energy. Great Britain has had to grope her way, painfully, with many stumblings

and strayings, to that summit of power which is now securely in her possession. But therein, precisely, lies the value of her record to Americans. You can learn from her successes; you can learn almost as much from her mistakes. If I were an American—and the past twenty years have made me very largely one in sympathy and sentiment—I should be inclined to urge, as the first step towards national preparedness, a thorough study of British problems and performances since August, 1914. For in the fundamental conditions that determine a country's attitude towards war and its capacity to wage it, Great Britain and the United States are so similar as to be virtually one and the same land. Neither nation is organized for war, as Prussia for instance has been organized for the past hundred and fifty years. Neither nation regards war as the chief end of its existence. Neither in normal times and as a regular item in its policy enjoys universal military service. Both are busy, commercial democracies, armed for defense but meditating no aggression upon any other Power, with a strong bias of individualism in their composition, much more concerned with the factory than with the camp, firm in their attachment to representative and responsible government, suspicious of all State control and particularly suspicious of anything that tends to exalt the military over the civil power. Both have been accustomed to rely for their protection upon a small efficient professional army with larger but much less highly trained reserves of militia in the background. We in Great Britain found in 1914 when the storm broke upon us how utterly inadequate was such provision to the demands of modern war and that nothing less than the arraying of the entire nation in arms would meet the needs of the crisis. Were a similar crisis to confront Americans they too would make the same discovery. They too would have to face on the spur of the moment the vast and varied problems of enrolling and training the whole manhood of the country. In that event I hope they would duplicate our triumphs while avoiding our blunders. I hope they would profit by our experience instead of by their own errors. Indeed I cherish a greater hope than that. There is no reason why Americans should not apply the lessons taught them by Great Britain in such a way that even the gravest emergency will find them ready to cope with it, fortified with ample knowledge of how to set about the business,

provided beforehand with a plan of action and the necessary machinery for its execution. We were caught two and a half years ago largely, grievously, unprepared. An Englishman can have no dearer wish than that Americans should never find themselves in any such predicament. They need not unless they wish to. With a little forethought, a little application, a little energy, a little common-sense, they can succeed, not only where we succeeded but also where we failed.

In this article I propose to bring out, if I can, some of the lessons to be learned from the tale of British recruiting. When the war broke out the utmost we could put into the field was 550,000 men. The regular army with its reserves accounted for 300,000 and the Territorial Force, corresponding to the American National Guard, only partially trained and not liable, except as volunteers, for foreign service, contributed a further 250,000. But of these 550,000 men over 100,000 were serving in India or other foreign stations. For the defense of the United Kingdom, consequently, and for the dispatch of an expeditionary force, only about 400,000 men were available, more than half of whom were not fully trained. And not only was our army a small one but it had no arrangements for expansion. Its recruiting machinery and personnel barely sufficed to collect the customary annual quota of 30,000 recruits. Indeed only a month before the outbreak of the war the military authorities were solemnly debating how best to improve the methods of obtaining these 30,000 a year. The recruiting offices were as a rule hidden away in poky back streets, with one medical officer in attendance; and an elaborate series of questions had to be administered, and a prodigious number of forms filled up, and each new recruit was compelled to have a bath before the King's shilling was handed to him and he became a duly enrolled member of His Majesty's forces. In those leisurely days some 500 persons comprised the total recruiting staff of the country. Today there are all but 7,000 engaged on nothing else. Great Britain declared war on Tuesday, August 4. On the previous Saturday the officer in charge of Great Scotland Yard, the principal recruiting office in London, attested only eight men. On Sunday and on Monday the office was closed. On Tuesday he found a seething mass of men outside the doors and it took nearly half an hour and twenty policemen to force

a path to his desk. For the whole of that day and for many days to come he was attesting men as hard as he could. So it was all over Great Britain. Men waited in thousands under a broiling sun the whole day long for their turn to come and were then, as often as not, told to come again next day. In the country districts they walked twenty miles and more to the nearest recruiting station and after enlisting would quietly lie down in a ditch for the night. Lord Kitchener on August 8 called for 100,000 volunteers. He got them in a fortnight. Instead of 30,000 recruits in a year more than that rolled in in a single day. In the fifth week of the war 175,000 enlisted for the Regular Army alone; many more joined the Territorials; and the full total of those who offered themselves in that one week can hardly have been less than 250,000.

Naturally the old machinery for recruiting broke down. But civilian volunteers quickly rushed to the rescue. Members of Parliament, armed with a scrap of Lord Kitchener's handwriting, spread over the country, assuming unheard-of responsibilities, turning the city halls into recruiting offices, engaging the necessary doctors out of hand, abolishing one by one the old formalities of enrollment, and improvising accommodation and a commissariat for the attested recruits, and explaining the cause for which Great Britain was fighting to huge and excited audiences. Getting the men, it was soon seen, was easy enough. Indeed it was fatally easy. The preparations that had been made and the reserves of material that had been accumulated on the basis of the pre-war establishment proved utterly inadequate to feed, house, clothe, equip, arm and drill these scores and hundreds of thousands of new recruits. The food was to be had, indeed, but there was no machinery for its proper distribution; there were no barracks, no huts, no tents to deal with so huge a host; the most essential items in their equipment would have required under normal conditions years to produce and even under the highest pressure could not be turned out at anything like the rate at which the men were coming forward; and as nearly all the officers and N.C.O's of the Regular Army had left for the Front there was next to nobody available for the drilling and training of the New Army. Very much the same situation arose in the American Civil War. Flooded with far more men than he could handle Stanton at the end of the first year of the

war stopped recruiting and dispersed his staff. It was a suicidal policy but we came near to repeating it in England two years ago. The War Office did not actually put up the shutters of the recruiting offices but on September 11, being at its wits' end how to deal with the 500,000 men who had then joined up, it raised the standard for recruits. The device was but too successful. In the first week of its adoption the number of recruits for the Regular Army fell to less than a third of the figures for the previous week. A little later they were less than a ninth. But the falling off of recruits was only part of the evil. The nation got it into its head that enough had been done, that the War Office was satisfied and that no more men were needed. The splendid enthusiasm of the opening days and weeks of the war was severely checked and its subsequent restoration required a titanic effort.

The second phase of recruiting in Great Britain is really the history of this effort. When the primal instinctive rush to the colors had been deliberately dammed by the War Office the people rather tended to infer that in this as in previous wars Great Britain's main functions would be not to supply fighting men but to keep the seas and furnish the Allies with the sinews of war. The country, it must be remembered, had never known conscription; it was not invaded; there was little to bring the war visibly home to it; and the sluggish, unrealizing cast of the national temperament made it difficult for the mind to grasp what the eyes did not see. On the morrow of some German atrocity, like the bombardment of undefended ports, there was always a big flow of men into the recruiting offices; but though the standard of height and chest measurement and physical fitness was lowered in October and the age-limit extended, and no further step was taken to limit the number of volunteers, it was clear that a special campaign would be needed if the nation was to put forth its full strength. This campaign was undertaken by the united organizations of all the political parties. They deluged the country with speakers, they covered the walls with posters, they filled the newspapers with advertisements, they sent out something like 8,000,000 letters of appeal, they utilized the services of wounded men home from the front, they turned the cinematograph into a most effective agency, they organized recruiting bands and parades, they conducted, in short, a campaign that was

more like an American Presidential election than anything that had ever been seen in Britain. Over 54,000,000 posters and leaflets were issued, over 12,000 meetings held, over 20,000 speeches delivered. Meanwhile cities and counties and private individuals began raising local battalions, making themselves responsible for the clothing, feeding, housing and initial training of the units, subject of course to future reimbursement by the War Office. These local battalions, each recruited from its own neighborhood, caught the popular imagination and evoked an immense amount of local patriotism. No less than 243 of them have been raised, including a whole Division of "Bantams" of men, that is, between 5 feet and 5 feet 3 inches in height who had hitherto been excluded from the army.

By these methods more than 2,000,000 men had been enlisted within a year from the beginning of the war. But they were wasteful methods. They were wasteful because they were indiscriminate. They made no distinction between the men who ought to be in the army and the men who would be more usefully employed in making munitions, on the railways, on the farms, or in industries that it was vital to maintain if the national wealth was to stand the strain of the war. It was to bring about a more judicious and a better organized system of recruiting as well as to tabulate all our remaining resources of man and woman-power that the National Registration Act was passed in July, 1915. Under its terms not only had the actual occupation of every male and female between the ages of 15 and 65 to be declared, but also their capacity for any other business which might be serviceable to the country. More than 150,000 volunteers, mostly women, quickly offered themselves for the work of collecting the cards and checking and collating the information contained in them; and in a very few weeks and without a single hitch or the creation of any new machinery, a complete survey had been made of the whole country and of every man and woman in it between 15 and 65. At the same time various committees were busily at work weighing the comparative needs of the army, munition works, and agriculture and other civil industries. Their recommendations, when placed side by side with the results of the Registration, made it possible to draw up lists of trades in the order of their national importance and to decide in the case of some of them that no workers, even though of military

age, should be drafted from them into the Army. These trades were known as "reserved occupations" and the registration cards of the men employed in them were "starred" as a precaution against their being taken away for other purposes.

Everything was now complete for a final effort of the voluntary system. Each recruiting office was supplied with the registration cards giving the names and addresses and occupations of all the men of military age in its district. There was a great outburst of posters and advertisements on the boardings; the party organizations redoubled their activities; recruiting marches composed of troops of all arms, headed by the regimental bands, paraded the country, one of them, and an extremely successful one, being no less than 8,000 strong; the Germans came opportunely to the assistance of the War Office by a series of Zeppelin raids; and Lord Derby was appointed Director-General of Recruiting. Lord Derby's outstanding innovation was the system of group-recruiting. Those who wanted to enlist at once were still allowed to do so. Those who preferred merely to attest their willingness to fight if called upon and in the meantime to remain undisturbed in their civil employments were immediately placed in the reserve under one of 46 groups according to their age and married or single state—the first 23 groups consisting of single men between the ages of 18 and 41, a group for each year, and the second 23 groups being similarly allocated to married men. By this arrangement the War Office could always reckon on being able to call up a given number of recruits just as and when it wanted them. Two stipulations were attached to Lord Derby's campaign. One was that if it failed after a two months' trial to produce enough men for the Army's needs, some form of compulsory service would be introduced. The other was that no married men were to be called up until the groups of single men had been exhausted and that if the single men were found not to have attested in satisfactory numbers compulsion would be applied to them before the married volunteers were summoned to the colors.

On December 11, 1915, after two months of incessant effort, the lists were formally closed. The campaign had proved a big success. It had brought 275,000 men directly into the army; it had induced 2,250,000 men to attest their readiness to join up when called upon. But it had also

shown that a considerable number of single men of military age had neither attested nor enlisted. A Bill was rapidly passed through Parliament in January of last year applying compulsion to these reluctant bachelors; but before it was put into operation the group-tests were reopened, a great rush of recruits followed, and comparatively few single men were left to be gathered in by compulsion. The principle of compulsion, however, having thus been established it was only a question of time before it was enforced universally. On May 25 all men between the ages of 18 and 41 in Great Britain became liable for military service. At the same time tribunals were set up in every recruiting area to pass upon individual cases, to decide, for instance, whether a given individual for business or family reasons was not entitled to temporary or permanent exemption, to examine, or rather to re-examine, the position of the men in the "reserved occupations," to hear the pleadings of the conscientious objectors who, however, in spite of the attention they have attracted, only number two per cent. of the total claimants for exemption, and to comb out all the employees, manual or clerical, in industry or the Government offices or anywhere else whose work could be done at a pinch by boys or women or men above military age. There are nearly 1,500 of these tribunals in Great Britain. They are all composed of busy men who receive no pay and precious few thanks for their unenviable but most necessary labors. On the whole they have deservedly earned the confidence of the country. Only about four per cent. of their decisions have been appealed against; and they are still at work putting the finishing touches to their task of distributing the burden of military service as widely and equitably as possible. But it is worth noting that before either they or the compulsory system came into existence over 5,000,000 men, or more than 11 per cent. of the total population of the British Isles, had voluntarily joined the Army—a record of patriotic eagerness and sacrifice unparalleled, I believe, in the history of any land. It seems probable that, with the additional numbers brought in by conscription, at least 6,500,000 men of the United Kingdom will have served with the colors before the war is over.

The lessons to be derived from such a record lie on its face. It was our great fault in Great Britain that we had never thought out the recruiting problem in advance and

that the war found us utterly ignorant of the number of eligible men that we might reasonably hope to enlist. That, I say, was a grave fault. But it will be nothing less than a crime if the United States duplicates our error. There is no clearer injunction laid upon Americans by British experience than this—that they should take stock of their man-power betimes; that they should know beforehand how many men at a time of crisis would be at their disposal. If I were an American I should certainly seek to lay the foundations of preparedness by urging upon both the State and the Federal Governments the necessity for a census of all the able-bodied men between 18 and 41, with a list of their occupations. In no other way, as we have found in Great Britain, can recruiting proceed on a scientific basis and a just proportion be observed between the claims of the Army and the claims of industry. To enlist everybody who offers himself and who is physically fit means in practice crippling trades that are vital to victory. I do not know exactly how many men we have had to discharge from the Army simply because, however excellent they were as soldiers, they were still more useful to the nation as foremen and skilled artisans; but they can hardly by now be less than 60,000. It was not until we got the National Registration Act, nearly a year after the commencement of the war, that the waste and misdirection of energy involved in training men to fight who had afterwards to be reinstated in their civilian occupations was obviated. Were each State in the American Union to pass a Registration Act of its own, to prepare, in other words, and to keep up to date, a muster-roll of its potential recruits, the main difficulty in the way of raising, if necessary, an American army of 10,000,000 men would be removed. You would know where you were; each State could tell almost at a glance which men could be spared for the army and which ought to be retained in the trades that support the main fabric of the nation's commerce or furnish the infinitely varied paraphernalia of modern war; you would obtain, in short, a bird's-eye view of the whole situation. That preliminary survey, if British experience goes for anything, is absolutely indispensable when there is any question of recruiting men on so large a scale as to affect the proper balance between military and industrial needs. Without it you lose time—and time is the most precious of military commodities; you squander

energy—and energy in a life and death struggle is precisely what you cannot afford to squander; you grope and fumble in the dark when the imperative necessities of the hour call for brisk and confident progress in the light; you take steps that have afterwards to be retraced, you do work merely to find yourself later on compelled to undo it, you bungle a business that with a little prevision you might have dispatched with a clear-cut swiftness and efficiency. I doubt whether there is today a single Englishman who would not assert that for a country like the United States the first and essential starting point in any programme of preparedness is the compilation of a roster that will show at once the numbers, addresses and occupation of all the men of military age in each State. The information thus collected would naturally and automatically find its way to the War Department, there to be studied and classified. And it would be no small gain if the Federal Government lent its assistance by adding military statistics to the other objects fulfilled by the decennial census returns. In Great Britain at any rate I shall hope to see the day when special cards to be filled up by all men of military age are sent to every household in the land whenever a national census is taken.

Another lesson that is very forcibly impressed by British experience is that recruiting is or should be a civilian business. That is to say the military should prescribe the general terms and conditions of enlistment, but the actual raising of the volunteer armies should be left in civilian hands. Americans in this respect have a very great advantage over the people of Great Britain in the fact that theirs is a Federal system of Government, that each State is a self-contained entity, and that the natural recruiting-sergeants of the country are the forty-six Governors of the States, who have at their instant command not only all the necessary local knowledge and experience but also the machinery of administration. Were I an American I should most strongly urge upon the Governor of my State the necessity of preparing a plan of recruiting without one day's delay. Such a plan would include, first, the selection of the most prominent buildings in the cities and villages as recruiting stations; secondly, the designation and enrollment of an adequate staff of doctors and clerks; thirdly, the choice—in consultation, of course, with the military authorities—of sites for camps and training grounds; fourthly, the regis-

tration of the local firms that could be depended upon to furnish huts, tents and food supplies; and fifthly, a survey of the private dwelling houses adjacent to each camp on which recruits could be immediately billeted. With the ground-plan thus completed, all the rest would follow in orderly sequence. If it were necessary, for instance, as we found it to be in Great Britain, to explain the issues to the people and to rouse their patriotic enthusiasm, an American Governor, using the unequalled organization of the political parties throughout his State and having within arm's reach the most expert writers of advertisements and designers of telling posters in the world, would quickly achieve results that would throw our British efforts into the shade. And just as the War Department would throw upon the Governors of the States the main responsibility for recruiting, so the Governors of the States, if they had profited by British example, would pass it on as much as possible to the Mayors of the various towns. A measured devolution is the essence of successful recruiting; and the most fruitful plan that can be adopted is that which enlists troops on a strictly territorial basis (so that men of the same neighborhood train and fight together), which elicits the greatest amount of local interest, and which encourages wealthy men to raise at their own initial expense special battalions in their own localities.

But all recruiting is conditioned by two factors. The first factor is the supply of officers. The second is the supply of armaments. It is of no use enlisting men by the hundreds of thousands unless there are officers to train them and rifles and other equipment ready for their use. If the civilian authorities hand over to the military authorities more men than the latter can possibly absorb and turn to account, the result is a breakdown. That, as I have described, was what happened to Great Britain. To get round it we adopted the disastrous expedient of checking enlistment by artificial expedients, with the consequence that an immense effort was subsequently necessary to start the flow of recruits again. There is a much better way. It is the way that we ultimately adopted ourselves, and that Americans, I think, would do well to copy. It consists in accepting every fit man who comes forward but in not calling him to the colors until he is wanted, until, that is, the military are ready to receive him. The moment he enlists

and the doctors have certified him as sound, he becomes a soldier and receives a soldier's pay. But instead of instantly entraining him for the nearest camp or depot, he is sent back to his civilian employment and told to remain in it until the military authorities need him. The system works very smoothly. It is decided, for instance, that the military organization in New York State is in a position to handle 100,000 recruits. When that total is reached men ought not to be, as they were in Great Britain, discouraged from enlisting. On the contrary the door should remain wide open and every inducement held out to enter it. But those who do so should be placed on the active reserve, sent home, urged to resume their normal life, and wait until a summons from the Commanding Officer tells them that they are wanted. In this way the disturbance to civil life and business is reduced to a minimum and the military authorities are enabled to cut their coat according to their cloth, to plan ahead, and to take stock from day to day of the resources at their disposal. In no other way, indeed, can recruiting in an unprepared nation that does not possess a system of universal service and that is called upon to develop its utmost fighting power on the spur of the moment—in no other way can it proceed without an infinity of waste, confusion, and needless dislocation. We have paid in Great Britain during the past two and a half years a heavy and bitter price to assimilate that simple fact.

With the well-nigh innumerable problems involved in producing munitions and material on the scale demanded by modern war—problems on which British experience throws a light of the highest power—I cannot deal in this article. But there is one factor intimately connected with recruiting on which a word or two should be said—I mean the supply of officers and their training. We were badly off in both respects in Great Britain when the war broke out. Outside the Regular Army, which of course was dispatched to the Front, and the Territorials, we had very few officers and such as we had, while keen and intelligent, knew next to nothing of what soldiering was. What saved the situation was the Officers' Training Corps founded by Lord Haldane and attached to practically all our universities and our great public schools. The officers who were members of, or had graduated from, these Training Corps and had then passed into civil life knew at any rate the rudiments of drill;

and with the help of retired N. C. O's and a few officers on the active list of the Regular Army and a considerable array of dug-outs they proceeded to put the new armies through their paces. But so engrossing was this work that they had no chance of carrying on their own military education. Until the end of 1914 there was practically no training whatever for the officers of the new armies. The first batch were put through a month's hurried course, but even this had to be dropped, so urgent and overriding was the necessity of licking the raw recruits into some sort of shape. Gradually schools for the instruction of officers in musketry, signalling, telephone, engineering for trench work, and the use of grenades, mortars and machine guns began to spring up. But it was not until the opening of the year 1916 that their training was thoroughly organized. No officer now gets a commission unless he has served six weeks in the ranks. Then he goes to a cadet corps for four months. After that he is posted to his unit for three months. The most efficient men are then sent to a Senior Officers' Corps for a further three months. It is only, in short, after a year's severe training that a lieutenant is now considered fit to go to the Front in charge of his men. In all this, I imagine, there is more than one hint that Americans might usefully bear in mind, and more than one question they would do well to revolve. What steps, in particular, are being taken by the American Universities and by the large private schools that have become in recent years so distinctive a feature of American education, to establish Officers' Training Corps and to instruct the youth of the country in the elements of soldiering I do not know. But I do know that if, when your time comes, and you have to grapple with the tremendous task of raising armies that run into millions, you are forced to depend for their training upon the officers of the Regular Army and the National Guard and have no outside source of supply, it will go desperately hard with you. And I also know that, short of universal service, there is no factor in preparedness more vital than the steady pouring forth from the schools and universities of batches of young men who are not unversed in the duties of an officer and who are ready, when the call upon them is made, to take charge of hastily-raised recruits with everything to learn and turn them into soldiers.

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